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REVIEW ESSAY

Islam, education and inclusion: towards a social justice agenda?

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Teaching against Islamophobia, edited by J. Kincheloe, S. Steinberg and C. Stonebanks, New York, Peter Lang Publishers, 2010, 336 pp., £22.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-43-310336-0

The new folk devils: Muslim boys and education in England, by F. Shain, Stoke on Trent, Trentham, 2011, 182 pp., £20.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-85-856442-5

Islamic education and indoctrination: the case in Indonesia, by C. Tan, New York, Routledge, 2011, 208 pp., £80.75 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-41-587976-7

Culture, identity and Islamic schooling: a philosophical approach, by M. Merry, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 228 pp., £19.14 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-23-010353-5

Since the bombings of 9/11 and 7/7 the world has changed dramatically. Both the United Kingdom and USA declared the 'War on Terror'. The bombings had a huge impact on international affairs, and particularly how Muslims were stereotyped and portrayed in public and political discourses. On 11 September 2001 Islamic Al-Qaeda extremists hijacked four planes and carried out suicide attacks in the USA. Two of the planes flew directly into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York, another plane hit the Pentagon in Washington, DC and the fourth crashed in Pennsylvania. The attacks caused extensive death and destruction, in which over 3000 people were killed. In the United Kingdom on 7 July 2005 there was a series of coordinated suicide bomb attacks in London on the public underground system during the morning rush hour. Four terrorists detonated bombs, three in quick succession on underground trains across London and another on a double-decker bus in Tavistock Square. A total of 52 people, including the four bombers, were killed in the attacks and over 700 people were injured. It was later revealed that three of the bombers were 'home-grown terrorists',

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British-born Pakistanis who lived and worked in Leeds, with another being Jamaican born. Following these attacks, there were significant changes in how Muslims were seen and portrayed both in the media and in society in general. The London bombings had a significant impact on definitions of belonging, Britishness and issues of citizenship. Such debate was heightened by public and political media discourses by then British Prime Minister Tony Blair and high-profile British MPs such as Gordon Brown, and in 2006 Jack Straw who spoke of the dangers of 'segregated communities' in reference to Muslim communities in his own constituency of Blackburn (North West England):

> We have to be clearer about what it means to be British, what it means to be part of this British nation of nations and, crucially, to be resolute in making the point that what comes with that is a set of values. Yes, there is room for multiple and different identities, but those have to be accepted alongside an agreement that none of these identities can take precedence over the core democratic values of freedom, fairness, tolerance and plurality that define what it means to be British. (Straw 2007)

Consequently, the teaching of citizenship in schools became a major concern for politicians, with an agenda focusing on issues of security and the prevention of extreme values and morals and 'Britishness'. These issues were reflected in the Education and Inspections Act of 2006, which placed emphasis on schools to encourage and promote 'community cohesion'. Schools were seen as key vehicles through which Britishness could be emphasised in relation to community cohesion and what this entailed whilst living in British society (see Osler 2009). In 2007, the Department for Education and Skills commissioned The Ajegbo Report due to specific concerns around the 'War on Terror', which introduced a new strand to the teaching of citizenship in schools on 'identity and diversity'. The report extended the framework of the Crick Report but did not explore issues of race and racism in relation to schooling (Osler 2008). The Ajegbo Report states:

> The term 'British' means different things to different people. In addition, identities are typically constructed as multiple and plural. Throughout our consultation, concerns were expressed about defining 'Britishness', about the term's divisiveness and how it can be used to exclude others. (Department for Education and Skills 2007, 10)

It goes on to say:

> If children and young people are to develop a notion of citizenship as inclusive, it is crucial that issues of identity and diversity are expressed explicitly – but getting the pedagogical approach right will be critical: the process of dialogue and communication must be central to pedagogical strategies for Citizenship. (Department for Education and Skills 2007, 10)

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Many authors recognised problems around the Ajegbo Report and its impact on notions of citizenship, Britishness and British values; what these meant and how these were taught in schools. David Gillborn has argued that we are in a climate in which institutional racism continues to exist and, 'far from promoting antiracism, in practice citizenship education operates as a form of placebo … implicated in a series of policy developments that threaten to worsen an already critical situation' (2006, 85). Osler goes further to state that the 'identity and diversity' strand in the citizenship curriculum may become a new placebo:

> If schools promote a depoliticised multiculturalism which does not encourage political literacy or critical analysis, there is a real danger that this will leave unchallenged (and possibly disguise) the considerable inequalities within schools, while allowing individual institutions to assert that are fulfilling their duty to promote community cohesion. (Osler 2009, 14)

Recent research has shown that racism towards Muslims has significantly increased both in the USA and in the United Kingdom. Following the 9/11 attacks in the USA, discrimination and racialised violence has shown a significant increase against those from Muslim groups. It has been argued that in the post-9/11 climate Muslim Americans have been racialised in American society, and this is based on cultural, political and religious markers (Maira 2009). In the United Kingdom following the 7/7 attacks there has also been a significant increase in racism towards Muslims,[1] including verbal and physical harassment.

It is within this context and backdrop that these four texts should be understood and conceptualised. The texts examine aspects of Muslim identity in current society, focusing on discourses of racism, Islamophobia and discrimination. They focus on issues in the United Kingdom and the USA and are key exemplars of the Global North. They examine these aspects by exploring how a social justice agenda can be reached either through an inclusive pedagogy or by understanding how Muslim identities would be affected by this. The commonality of the texts stems from the notion that they are all (in their own ways) arguing for an inclusive and social justice agenda in relation to exploring aspects of religious identity for Muslims in education. All texts recognise the difficulties associated with aspects of inclusion and how it can be incorporated into the teaching of religion for a greater aspect of understanding of religion as well as a way of increasing tolerance between different religious groups. In relation to the issue of tolerance, Charlene Tan in *Islamic Education and Indoctrination* explores indoctrination as specific control beliefs that result in ideological totalism. She discusses two types of indoctrination: voluntary and coercive. She goes on to explore three aspects of the indoctrinatory tradition; the key characteristics of the ideology, the justification for the ideology and the strategies for

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indoctrination. This particular book provides a case study of Indonesia in which the differences between an indoctrinatory tradition and an educative tradition are spelled out. The main differences between the two are based on the number of control beliefs held by a person, the extent of embeddedness for the control beliefs and one's response to new information in relation to this. By providing a broad overview of Islamic schools and identities, the author argues that there has been a significant increase in Islamic schools since the late 1980s and that Islamic education in Indonesia is 'amongst the most open and innovative in the world' (*Islamic Education and Indoctrination*, 75). In this respect, the schools are not rooted in indoctrinatory traditions; rather, they use and in fact welcome knowledge from non-Islamic sources, and 'seek to enhance their student's rationality and autonomy through their mission, curriculum and pedagogy' (112). What is particularly interesting about this book is how the discourses of being a Muslim are understood in relation to aspects of 'liberalism' such as anti-American and anti-western attitudes in Indonesia that represent (according to the author) all things American and by implication are 'immoral' and 'unIslamic'. To express an educative tradition, schools need to prescribe to and promote the control beliefs of religious pluralism, strong rationality and strong autonomy. Through this process, indoctrination can be controlled and avoided through the creation, sustenance and propagation of educative traditions and approaches that promote religious pluralism from which an Islamic perspective can work. She hopes 'that the net of educative Muslim traditions may be cast far and wide in Indonesia and other parts of the world' (149). One of the main things the book attempts to do is to counter stereotypes and negative images of Muslim schools. This book is a welcome addition to material that could be used by teachers and educators alike – both in Indonesia and other societies where educational inclusion is seen as a goal.

From a more practical perspective, Kincheloe, Steinberg and Stonebanks in *Teaching against Islamophobia* provide examples of the teaching of Islam in schools. The strength of the collection is that it is written by authors who are either Muslims themselves or have first-hand experience of teaching from an Islamic perspective. This is a practical book for those teaching about Islam; it is written from an international US and Canadian perspective. The editors make it clear from the onset that this book is about teaching that focuses on issues of racism and Islamophobia: 'We use the term Islamophobia to isolate instances which have been applied to Islamic peoples or those who appear to be Muslim' (*Teaching against Islamophobia*, x). The authors recognise the controversy of the term and the limitation of it, but state: 'it defines experiences of discrimination, dehumanisation and misrepresentations of Muslims, those of Muslim heritage and a systematic mis education about Islam itself' (x). Islamophobia is recognised as reflecting the ongoing experiences of colonialism and imperialism, and one of the main aims of the book is to produce a 'de-colonising' or anti-colonial critical pedagogy,

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particularly in relation to establishing an inclusive pedagogy for visible and non-visible Muslims. Providing a historical and ideological framework for teaching about Islam is crucial for an inclusive pedagogy, and the book does this well; it also provides specific examples of anti-Islamophobic teaching in schools. Exploring a politics of identity and how this manifests within an autobiographical narrative helps the reader to engage in the writings that are used for an inclusive pedagogical approach. The authors (quite rightly) explore the complexity of the relationship between the West (USA) and Islam, and emphasise the USA's role in supporting dictators and tyrants in the Islamic world: 'a literacy of power becomes more and more important as we struggle to counter the mis education that continues to shape American views of the world' (25). The main strength of the collection is the diversity of examples the authors use to demonstrate how Muslims are portrayed in the West; for example, in comic books, cartoons, film and popular culture.

Culture, Identity and Islamic Schooling is a philosophical approach to understanding Islamic education in liberal democratic policies. Merry takes a critical examination of schooling by focusing on the USA, Belgium and the Netherlands. The author focuses on how pluralism as a concept works in relation to the teaching of Islam: 'a commonly held claim is that pluralism is a necessary element to schooling in as much as a more diverse school culture is more likely to foster tolerance towards others whose views differ' (*Culture, Identity and Islamic Schooling*, 3). The need for public education stems from the legitimate interests of society and its members concerning 'social stability, prosperity and democratic functions of learning' (4). Liberal education should teach cooperation and the tolerance of differences, and it is from this perspective that Islamic schools are seen as a healthy alternative to public schools, with 'an attempt to highlight the challenges that Muslim educators in the west face as they aim to reconcile an idealised caricature of Islamic philosophy with the on-the-ground needs of Muslim children socialised in a non-Islamic society' (6). It is clear there is a disjuncture between Islamic education ideals and the aspirations of school administrators and how Islamic schools operate in practice, particularly in relation to how the curriculum in Islamic schools affirms the identity of students in a way that the state and private schools do not. The challenge remains that Muslims educators have to integrate their faith into society that largely excludes Islam from the public sphere. An education for cultural coherence is able to satisfy the demands of liberal education because of its ability to satisfy the requirement of individual well-being. The author argues that parents and children's rights are different, and within this explores the limits of paternalism. He outlines the interests of the state as it touches upon the civic education of children and whether the aims of civic education are dictated by the state or whether it should be left to the parents to decide what education for citizenship means. There will always be competing interests between the parents

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and the state, but although the state is interested in providing an education designed for the public good, the immediate interests of the child should be paramount. In the USA, the government funds its own schools according to their own constitutional standards. There are two reasons for funding religious schools; pluralism and empirical research, which shows good academic success and civic preparedness compared with those in some public schools. The refusal of the state not to provide funding for religious schools makes us question the fact that we allow parents to choose schools for their children and that education is in the public interest and the state must assume responsibility for its future citizens. However, as the author states, Islamic schools are not a special case. Muslim parents share similar characteristics with parents of other religions who are eager to school their children in a culturally coherent environment in order to cultivate a strong religious identity.

Farzana Shain in *The New Folk Devils* explores how Muslim boys make sense of their local environments at a time of significant economic, political and social change. This is an empirical study conducted after the 'War on Terror' was declared both by the UK and US governments. The book challenges the dominant representation of Muslim boys and young men as social problems in current society by arguing that a process of individualisation is taking place in which Muslim boys are re-claiming and re-defining their identity of what it means to be a Muslim: 'Since the 1960s Muslim communities have consistently been characterised as policy problems in Britain and through the discourse of cultural racism as threatening to a mythic British way of life' (*The New Folk Devils*, 1). Consequently, the image of ethnic minorities conceptualised as a problem within British policy and public discourse is demonstrated through public and policy concerns that position Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities as problematic, particularly evidenced in recent policy responses through themes of race, nation and citizenship in state discourses. As a result, dominant discourses continue to position Muslim boys as underachievers who face a future of violent criminality or extremism and are positioned as self-segregating and isolationist. However, Shain argues that, contrary to public and political discourses, the boys in her study showed strong political awareness and activism. They adopted a range of strategies to counter dominant discourses on the 'War on Terror'. Many of the boys defined themselves as being a Muslim first, but this was not a fixed identity. Recent research, however, has found that some Asian women describe their identities as British Asian, making the distinction between themselves and other British women that signals the particular ways in which Asian women position themselves. One side of their identity is marked by the distinction between their lives and that of their mothers, and the realignment of their roles within traditional family and community life. The other side of their identity is characterised by the gulf between the lives of Asian women and their white counterparts (Bhopal 2010).

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Shain examines 'area-based' identities and how they are produced and contested in articulation with local histories, specifically in the context of the local white working-class neighbourhood struggles and Asian political struggles against far-right extremism and racism. The empirical data show that Muslim boys' strong investment in local area identities are sometimes racialised and sometimes not. Boys were forming identities that centred on both Asian and local working-class identities. What was particularly interesting was how the boys invested in local identities, but they did not support local football teams, and they avoided exclusivity and violent displays of Englishness that constitute working-class solidarity. They revealed a strong commitment to a 'community' ethos and one against individualism; there was 'an on-going process of ordering, fixing and categorising which was central to the construction and recognition of the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion' (*The New Folk Devils*, 128). The boys defined their experiences of schooling in relation to racism, but they used religion to legitimise and defend their choices. The research reflects tradition and change, a challenge to dominant policy and political discourses that regard Muslim communities to be determined by narratives of culture and tradition and to individualisation theories that suggest young people's choices are becoming less influenced by tradition and social structures of class, race and gender. Shain argues that Muslim boys occupy the role of new folk devils at a time of significant economic, political and cultural global change. The 'War on Terror' has affected Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities who have been the subject of intense scrutiny around limits of multiculturalism. Boys expressed strong opinions on global, national and local politics. They self-defined as Muslims and constructed their masculine identities as superior to the West. They constructed their identities in opposition to the white, racist and imperialist culture of the school. Theories of risk suggest individuals are becoming detached from local bonds of tradition; traditional structures do not have the same holds and meanings they once did. Class, gender, ethnicity and neighbourhood are significant in their construction of future and current life trajectories. Shain argues there is a complex and contradictory nature to contemporary racism. The boys rejected Englishness and Britishness in their self-definitions, yet at the same time they made strong claims on Britishness and even Englishness. This is further marked by modern-day society that has generated new forms of individualisation, which can affect patterns of interaction in modern day society (Beck 1992). Consequently, changes in society result in neighbourhoods becoming scattered, in which new social relationships emerge. Individuals have to work hard to establish social ties, which have to be maintained and constantly renewed. Divisions between cultures and countercultures may therefore emerge are the same time as new forms of cultural and social identity develop.

These texts are a welcome addition to the current literature available on the discourses surrounding Muslim identities. They point to the need for

further acceptance of a group who continue to remain marginalised and to be openly persecuted by the media and society in general. The texts enable us to examine how issues of marginalisation of one particular group are further justified by a society in which greater understanding of Muslims is needed. It is through an inclusive pedagogy that a social justice agenda can be achieved as a goal through which we can move forward to a society where tolerance of others is accepted and education through teaching can make a difference, as Kincheloe, Steinberg and Stonebanks state: 'Our hope is for educators to move toward an inclusive classroom which creates personal and classroom spaces of learning based on research and personal discovery, so that they may become active participants in their world' – they hope that their book: '… will assist teachers and students to move toward the emancipatory educational path of critically considering reasons for Islamophobia and popular perceptions toward Islam, Muslims, and Arabic peoples' (*Teaching against Islamophobia*, xi).

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Note

1. See the Muslim Council of Britain website: http://www.mcb.org.uk.

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